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ABSTRACT

Many baseball players suffer from shoulder injuries related to the rotator cuff muscles. These injuries may be classified as muscular strain, tendonitis or tenosynovitis, and impingement syndrome. Treatment varies from simple rest to surgery, so it is important to be seen by a physician as soon as possible. In order to prevent these injuries, the following measures should be taken: (1) implement an extensive flexibility program; (2) implement a proper conditioning program including strength resisting exercise; (3) utilize proper body mechanics in the throwing motion; (4) rotate pitchers based on number of innings pitched; and (5) use an ice massage immediately after a game or heavy practice. If pain is reoccurring or continues for 72 hours, seek the advice of a physician. (DC)

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ROTATOR CUFF INJURIES

Many athletes participating in baseball suffer from shoulder problems related to rotator cuff injuries. The rotator cuff consists of four muscles: teres minor, infraspinatus, supraspinatus and subscapularis. These four muscles are primarily responsible for the rotary movements of the arm, structural support to the shoulder joint, and pulling the head of the upper arm bone (humerus) into the shoulder cavity (glenoid fossa) during various shoulder movements.

Injuries to the rotator cuff mechanism may be broken down into the following categories:

1) Muscular Strain - This may be classified into three degrees ranging from a simple overstretching to the third degree consisting of a complete rupture. This type of injury results primarily from either an overuse or overstretching of the muscle.

2) Tendonitis or tenosynovitis - involves an inflammation of the tendon region. The primary cause of this type of injury is either overuse or the implementation of improper body mechanics.

3) Impingement Syndrome - This is a result of the tendons being pinched between the bones involved in the shoulder complex. We are seeing more and more of this type of problem in athletes involved primarily in those sports which highly utilize the throwing mechanics. It is extremely important that this is diagnosed and seen early as it may result in complete functional loss of the shoulder.

The treatment for these injuries varies from simple rest to surgical intervention. Therefore, it is extremely important that an individual suffering from shoulder pain be seen by a physician as soon as possible.

Remember, all of these problems will require some time for rest. Therefore, don't rush your athlete back into competition too early.

The best means of treating these injuries is by preventing them from ever occurring. The following are preventative measures that should be employed by those individuals participating in baseball:

1) Implement an extensive flexibility program. However, remember flexibility exercises should not be considered warm-up; they should be completed after at least participating in 15 minutes of a warm-up activity.

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2) Proper conditioning program. This program should include some form of strength resisting exercise. It should be continued throughout the entire season and must begin at least 6 weeks prior to the beginning of the season.

3) Utilizing the proper body mechanics in the throwing motion. Place your emphasis on the utilization of the entire body during the throw. Carefully evaluate if the individual is using too much spin. This type of problem is highly associated with rotator cuff injuries.

4) The utilization of a proper pitching rotation. This should be done on a number of inning basis. I suggest you consult the local high school baseball coach as the number of days rest should coincide with the age of the athlete.

5) Some individuals suggest the use of ice after each game alters the normal body inflammatory process. If you wish to employ the services of ice, I suggest ice massage for a 7-10 minute period immediately after participating in a game or heavy practice. Don't let a small problem become a major one! If one of your athletes is suffering from reoccurring shoulder pain or a pain that continues for 72 hours, seek the advice of a physician.

Don't take a chance on your athletes future. They are counting on you for their success. If you have any questions, comments or suggestions regarding this article or any facet of sports medicine, write to the Institute for Medicine in Sports, P.O. Box 2621, Hamilton Square, NJ 08690 or phone (609) 586-4277. If you wish to make an appointment for physicians' clinic, sports rehab/physical therapy, cardio pulmonary rehab or a consultation regarding conditioning, nutrition and/or prevention call (609) 586-7900 ext. 6677.

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References

Treatment of Injuries to Athletes, O'Donoghue, W.B. Saunders, 1976.